

By Revd Mike Haslam

About Revd Mike

Revd Mike Haslam is [Chaplaincy Development Adviser at the Diocese of Bath and Wells](#).

With a background in youth work, parishes, schools and chaplaincies he is now supporting and developing a network of over 240 chaplains across 130 chaplaincies. Mike has a desk in Wells but most of his working life is lived out across Somerset, supporting and developing chaplaincy.

An 11-year-old student was asked what the school chaplain did. He replied that the chaplain was there to:

"Listen, care, pray for and bless the school."

There are as many models of chaplaincy as there are of the local church, yet this remains one of the most all-encompassing and concise



Chaplaincy is a growing part of the mixed ecology of the church

It is a missional ministry, going out from the local faith community and meeting people where they are, living and sharing faith there. This also means that chaplaincy works with a significantly younger and more diverse population than those often present within our church communities.

The Church of England's 2020s vision could almost have been written for chaplaincy.

Chaplaincy cannot exist without the local church

Every Christian chaplain that I know (including me) has been raised up through the local church. The local church continues to pray for us and support us in so many ways, including financially. At their best chaplaincies, new and well-established, are partnerships between the local faith communities, the chaplains and the organisations we serve.

Is God calling me to be a chaplain?

In the Diocese of Bath and Wells, we have seen what has been described as 'an explosion' of chaplaincy. Over fifty new chaplaincies have been established over the past five years, in community secondary schools, care homes, a nuclear power station, villages and estates and beyond.

One of the most significant aspects of this growth have been the number of secular organisations, with no previous history of chaplaincy, who have come to us and said 'yes' they would like a chaplain. Alongside this has been a wonderful line of people from local churches of all traditions and denominations, who have asked the question, 'Is God calling me to be a chaplain?' and have been willing to respond and serve.

At a sports chaplaincy conference I was asked for my greatest sporting moment. I said that I didn't have one – and was nearly thrown out – but that I was there because I was passionate about chaplaincy, meeting people where they are and offering to journey with them. I later reflected that even chaplaincy is only incidental to me. I'm passionate about working alongside the 95% who do not regularly visit a local church and chaplaincy is one of the pathways that can enable this ministry and mission.

The impact of chaplaincy

In September 2021, between the first and second wave of Covid, I met with focus groups in a few communities and asked them about the impact of chaplaincy. Here's what they said:

A hospital Ward Sister said:

"I wouldn't have got through the last few months without the chaplains. The support they gave the staff and the patients through a very difficult time was amazing. They've got this knack of finding you, this inner sense of where you are and when you need them to visit."

A member of staff at Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station said of their newly appointed chaplain:

"Very helpful professionally and personally (coming from a place of extreme scepticism). The chaplain draws together a people together across boundaries. The impact can't be described in numbers. It's about the practice of faith."

Dr Mike Osborn, Clinical Psychologist at Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust (at the height of the covid pandemic) said:

"Acute hospitals are very hot, busy places. It's a challenge to meet the targets and offer therapeutic care. Chaplains are essential. They are present in every part of the hospital, offering spiritual and psychological care. Without them, who else is there, offering that level of contact and comfort? Without the chaplaincy we would continue to focus on the bio-medical data but we would be at risk of losing touch with the real, lived experience of patients."

Medics are under pressure to be concise and knowing. At the heart of chaplaincy is uncertainty, unknowing, journeying with people. The chaplain's main therapeutic 'weapon' is powerlessness."

Chaplains have an overview of the whole hospital and an independence. They speak truth to power in a helpful and constructive way. They offer intimate support to patients and are a critical friend to the organisation. They both 'rise above it' and get mucky and involved."

The chaplaincy gift of time and listening is as important as sterile conditions in a hospital operating theatre. Time is their infection control measure. If chaplaincy didn't exist, you'd have to invent it pretty fast."

A student at Bath University said of the chaplaincy:

"Chaplaincy gave me hope that Christianity could be for me. They gave me a vision of the church family. They invest in me."

Who can be a Chaplain?

- All sorts of people from all backgrounds and walks of life are called by God to be chaplains. Chaplaincy can be a full time or a part-time role. It can be paid or voluntary and can be fulfilled by lay and ordained alike.

How do I become a Chaplain?

- First take time to pray and talk with people you know and trust in your local faith community. If you believe God is calling you to a chaplaincy role, or if you are considering setting up a chaplaincy in your school, workplace, organisation, or community [contact your Diocese for more information](#).

Find out more about the Church of England's Vision for the 2020s

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